

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CU-04 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-11 INR-10

LAB-06 NSAE-00 RSC-01 SIL-01 NIC-01 AID-20 IO-14 PM-07

DODE-00 PA-04 USIA-15 PRS-01 SP-03 DRC-01 OMB-01 /115 W

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R 091118Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3105

INFO AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

AMCONSUL UDORN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 7534

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, TH

SUBJECT: STATUS OF THE STUDENT MOVEMENT

REF: A. BKK 2156; B. BKK 2388; C. BKK 2673;
D. BKK 2956; E. BKK 3478; F. BKK A-64;
G. BKK 4336; H. BKK 7162.

SUMMARY: THERE HAVE BEEN NO LARGE STUDENT PROTESTS OR DEMONSTRATIONS SINCE FEBRUARY 1974. BEFORE THAT TIME VIOLENT PROTESTS, IRRATIONAL DEMANDS, AND APPARENT STUDENT FACTIONALISM CHARACTERIZED THE STUDENT MOVEMENT. TODAY THE PANEL DISCUSSION, SMALL HYDE PARK RALLY, OPEN LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER, AND UNITY AND COOPERATION WITH OTHER STUDENT AND NON-STUDENT GROUPS ARE MORE TYPICAL FEATURES. IF CURRENT TRENDS CONTINUE, THE STUDENT/PROFESSOR ALLIANCE WILL GROW TIGHTER, AND WILL TAKE UP THE CUDGELS FOR THAI FARMERS AND LABORERS. THIS ALLIANCE WILL INCREASINGLY HAVE TO SHARE THE SPOTLIGHT WITH PRESSURE GROUPS AND POLITICAL PARTIES. THE 1974-75 SCHOOL YEAR THAT BEGINS IN JUNE WILL SEE NEW STUDENT LEADERS WITH DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON THE PROBLEMS FACING THAILAND.

A. READING THE TEA LEAVES:

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1. SEKSAN PRASOETHKUN SAID ON 3 MARCH 1974: "PROTESTS AND DEMONSTRATIONS MAY NO LONGER BE RELEVANT TO THE CURRENT SITUATION....WHAT IS NEEDED ARE NEW FORMS OF ACTIVITIES IN ORDER TO COPE WITH NEW ISSUES SUCH AS CHANGING THE SOCIAL SYSTEM". (REF F.) THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF STUDENT ACTIVITIES SINCE FEBRUARY SUGGEST THAT SEKSAN WAS IN FACT MERELY RECONFIRMING A CONCLUSION HE AND HIS FELLOW STUDENT LEADERS HAD, AS A RESULT OF THE REACTION OF CONSERVATIVES TO THEIR CONTINUING PROTESTS, ALREADY BEGUN TO MAKE OPERATIONAL.

2. SEKSAN IN MID-JANUARY TOOK UP THE CUDGELS FOR BANGKOK STREET VENDORS AGAINST THE BANGKOK METROPOLITAN ADMINISTRATION (REF B). IN THE COURSE OF HIS PROTEST, HE THREATENED VIOLENCE IF THE METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT DID NOT MEET HIS DEMANDS FOR THE STREET VENDORS' RIGHTS TO SELL THEIR GOODS ON THE SIDEWALKS. THE PRESS AND OTHER STUDENT GROUPS SEVERELY REBUKED HIM FOR THIS STAND.

3. THE NATIONAL STUDENT CENTER OF THAILAND (NSCT), ALSO IN EARLY JANUARY, LED A CAMPAIGN AGAINST MERCHANTS HOARDING RICE, CEMENT, STEEL RODS, AND OTHER COMMODITIES. THROUGH A SEEMINGLY POPULAR CAUSE WITH THE GENERAL POPULATION, THIS ACTION DID NOT GO DOWN WELL WITH THE MERCHANTS--MANY OF WHOM HAD SUPPORTED THE STUDENTS DURING THE OCTOBER 1973 UPRISING (REF A).

4. THIRAYUT BUNMI AND THE PEOPLE FOR DEMOCRACY GROUP (PFD) BROUGHT VILLAGERS FROM BAN NA SAI TO BANGKOK IN MID-FEBRUARY TO DENOUNCE HEAVY HANDED GOVERNMENT COMMUNIST SUPPRESSION METHODS, AND RALLIED OTHER STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS TO THEIR CAUSE (REF D). THE MILITARY FOUND THIS TACK ESPECIALLY DISTASTEFUL. THIRAYUT WAS OBVIOUSLY AWARE OF THEIR DISPLEASURE WHEN DURING A RALLY AT SANAM LUANG HE ISSUED WHAT AMOUNTED TO A STANDING OPERATING PROCEDURE: "THERE IS A COUP, PLEASE LEAVE YOUR HOMES AND GATHER HERE."

5. THESE ARE BUT THREE EXAMPLES OF STUDENT ACTIVITIES DURING JANUARY AND EARLY FEBRUARY THAT WERE INCREASINGLY COUNTERPRODUCTIVE TO THE LONG TERM OBJECTIVES OF THE

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STUDENTS AND ACADEMICS FOR SOCIAL-POLITICAL REFORM IN THAILAND. THESE THREE CASES, HOWEVER, PROVIDE THE CLEARER INDICATIONS OF HOW WELL STUDENTS CAN READ THE TEA LEAVES AND LOWER THEIR PROFILE IN THE FACE OF CONSERVATIVE RESISTANCE. BOTH SEKSAN AND THIRAYUT SUBSEQUENTLY APOLOGIZED FOR THEIR ACTIONS, AND APPEARED TO HAVE DECIDED TO RETURN TO THE WELL-TESTED TACTICS OF THE PRE-1973 PERIOD IN THEIR EFFORT TO ENCOURAGE AND

"FORCE" REFORM IN THAILAND. THE STUDENTS AS A WHOLE DROPPED THEIR ANTI-HOARDING CAMPAIGN ALMOST AS QUICKLY AS IT BEGAN. SINCE MID-FEBRUARY THERE HAS BEEN A MARKED CHANGE IN THE ENTIRE STUDENT MOVEMENT.

B. INSTANT UNITY, AND NEW ISSUES:

6. THE FIRST MAJOR DEMONSTRATION OF THE STUDENTS' ATTEMPT TO CURB THE TREND TO FACTIONALISM THAT HAD CHARACTERIZED THEIR EFFORTS SINCE NOVEMBER 1973, AND COOPERATE WITH EACH OTHER AND WITH OTHER PRESSURE GROUPS, WAS A PUBLIC RALLY ON THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION HELD ON FEBRUARY 14 (EF C). THE FEDERATION OF INDEPENDENT STUDENTS OF THAILAND (FIST) JOINED WITH THE NSCT AND PFD IN A HYDE PARK RALLY TO ISSUE A STATEMENT OUTLINING THEIR PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE IN THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION. THE BAN NA SAI INCIDENT ADDED TO THE TREND TOWARD STUDENT UNITY. SEKSAN AND FIST JOINED WITH SOMBAT THAMRONGTHANYAWONG (NSCT) BEHIND THIRAYUT BUNMI AND THE PFD TO ISSUE DEMANDS FOR CHANGES IN RTG COMMUNIST SUPPRESSION POLICY (REF D).

7. THE SAME GROUPS PRESENTED ANOTHER UNITED FRONT IN EARLY MARCH TO PROTEST THE CONDUCT OF SOME NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY MEMBERS WHO WERE NOT PRESENT FOR THE INITIATION OF THE FIRST READING OF THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION. FINALLY, STUDENTS FROM ALL OVER THAILAND AND MANY DIFFERENT GROUPS COOPERATED WITH THE NSCT DURING APRIL IN THE DEMOCRACY TEACHING PROGRAM OF THE STATE UNIVERSITIES BUREAU (SUB) (REF G). THIS PROGRAM RELIED HEAVILY ON STUDENTS FROM TEACHER TRAINING INSTITUTIONS IN THE PROVINCES. RELATIVELY FEW UNIVERSITY STUDENTS FROM BANGKOK PARTICIPATED.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BANGKOK 7534

8. THE DEMOCRACY TEACHING PROGRAM COULD CONTRIBUTE TO GREATER STUDENT UNITY SIMPLY BECAUSE IT BROUGHT TOGETHER SO MANY STUDENTS, ALMOST 4000, IN WORK TOWARD A COMMON CAUSE. IN THIS SENSE, THE CAMPAIGN'S GREATEST PAYOFF WILL NOT NECESSARILY BE IN WHAT THE STUDENTS TAUGHT THAI FARMERS ABOUT DEMOCRACY, BUT WHAT THE THAI STUDENTS LEARNED ABOUT THE NEEDS OF THE FARMERS. THEIR FIELD EXPERIENCES AND THE EMPATHY THEY DEVELOPED FOR THE RURAL PEOPLE COULD GIVE THE STUDENTS A COMMON FRAME OF REFERENCE FROM WHICH TO TALK TO EACH OTHER AND PREPARE ACTIVITIES ON BEHALF OF THE FARMERS.

9. THE DEMOCRACY TEACHING CAMPAIGN IS OVER. STUDENT LEADERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THIS CAMPAIGN HAVE ALREADY BEGUN TO MAKE PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON WHAT THEY HAVE LEARNED ABOUT THE PRIMARY CONCERNS OF THE FARMERS, PARTICULARLY THE RISING COST OF LIVING AND LAND TENURE PROBLEMS. IN THE SOUTH, STUDENTS HAVE ALLEGED THAT THE POLICE HAVE BEEN WORKING IN LEAGUE WITH KIDNAPPERS. IN THE NORTHEAST, STUDENTS UNCOVERED A "SECOND BAN NA SAI INCIDENT" IN NAKHON PHANOM, ALTHOUGH THIS REVELATION DID NOT GENERATE ANY SERIOUS OUTCRY. MANY, INCLUDING STUDENTS THEMSELVES, CONSIDERED THE EARLIER ATTEMPTS TO TEACH DEMOCRACY IN 1973 FAILURES. THE SECOND ROUND APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN MUCH MORE SUCCESSFUL.
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10. SINCE THE END OF JANUARY THE NATIONAL VOCATIONAL STUDENTS CENTER OF THAILAND (NVSCT) HAS CEASED ALMOST COMPLETELY ITS PUBLIC PROTESTS. VOCATIONAL STUDENTS IN JANUARY WERE HURLING BRICKBATS AT THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND HIJACKING BUSES. PARTICULARLY THOSE STUDENTS AFFILIATED WITH THE NVSCT WERE BY THE END OF JANUARY DEEPLY ENGAGED IN A PROGRAM TO COLLECT WARM CLOTHING IN BANGKOK FOR DISTRIBUTION IN NORTH THAILAND DURING ONE OF THAILAND'S COLDEST WINTERS ON RECORD. CURRENTLY THE NVSCT, WITH SIGNIFICANT US MISSION SUPPORT, IS ENGAGED IN AN ANTI-DRUG ABUSE CAMPAIGN THAT WILL RUN THE ENTIRE MONTH OF MAY.

11. IN SPITE OF ALL THIS APPARENT EVIDENCE OF A MORE POSITIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE APPROACH TO THE SOCIAL-POLITICAL PROBLEMS FACING THAILAND, THERE ARE SOME DISTURBING

SIGNS IN THE OTHER DIRECTION. THE THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY CAMPUS DURING PUBLIC SEMINARS AND PANEL DISCUSSIONS HAS BECOME A CLEARING HOUSE FOR COMMUNIST LITERATURE AND SLOGANEERING. THE THOUGHTS OF MAO, HO CHI MINH, MARX, LENIN, AND EVEN LIN PIAO ARE ON SALE IN ENORMOUS QUANTITIES. NOWHERE CAN ONE FIND A PICTURE OF A LEADING NON-COMMUNIST, DEMOCRATIC THINKER, BE HE PLATO OR LINCOLN. IN THEIR LATEST PUBLIC PANEL DISCUSSION/SPEAKER PROGRAM ON MAY 1 (REF H), THE THAMMASAT STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS COOPERATED WITH VARIOUS LABOR ORGANIZATIONS AND OPENED THE CAMPUS TO THAI LABORERS. SEKSAN, THIRAYUT, AND DR. PUAU UNPHAKON WERE THE STARS OF THE SHOW WITH THE FORMER TWO PERHAPS FOR THE FIRST TIME BEGINNING TO DEVELOP ACTIVIST LINKS WITH THAI LABOR. THE MOST DISTURBING ASPECT OF THE MAY DAY ACTIVITIES WAS THE CONSTANT THEME THAT THE AMERICANS, ALONG WITH THE JAPANESE AND THAI GOVERNMENT BUREAUCRATS, WERE ENEMIES OF THE THAI PEOPLE.

C. PROSPECTS:

12. AS INDICATED ABOVE, THE MORE RECENT AND BETTER ORGANIZED DEMOCRACY TEACHING PROGRAM SHOULD STRENGTHEN STUDENT INTEREST IN THE THAI FARMER. PUAU'S INTEREST IN AND PUBLIC PROPOSALS FOR HELPING TO BETTER THE LIVES OF

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THE FARMERS COULD PROVIDE FURTHER INSPIRATION AND DIRECTION FOR THE STUDENTS ALONG THE SAME LINE. HYDE PARK RALLIES AND POSITION PAPERS DISCUSSING THE FUTURE OF THAI FARMERS, AND CALLING ON THOSE IN THE NLA AND THE GOVERNMENT TO ENACT LEGISLATION AND CARRY OUT PROGRAMS, COULD CHARACTERIZE THE 1974-75 SCHOOL YEAR. THE STUDENTS MAY ALSO, IF THE MAY DAY FESTIVITIES AT THAMMASAT ARE ANY INDICATION, PAY CLOSER ATTENTION TO THE INTERESTS OF LABOR. THEY WERE UNSUCCESSFUL IN THEIR EFFORTS IN THIS AREA IN 1973.

13. MASS PUBLIC STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS WITH VIOLENT OVERTONES SEEM UNLIKELY FOR THE DURATION OF THE SANYA GOVERNMENT. THE STUDENTS, MOREOVER, WILL NO LONGER BE THE DOMINANT ACTORS ON THE SCENE. THEY WILL HAVE TO COMPETE OR COOPERATE WITH OTHER ACTORS SUCH AS PRESSURE GROUPS AND POLITICAL PARTIES. SEKSAN'S MARCH 3 STATEMENT IS EVIDENCE THAT THE STUDENTS ALREADY APPEAR TO RECOGNIZE THIS NECESSITY. THEIR CONTINUED COOPERATION WITH THE UNION FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES (UCL) IS A CASE IN POINT (REF E).

14. THE STUDENT/ACADEMIC ALLIANCE IS LIKELY TO GROW STRONGER DURING 1974. UCL SHOULD PLAY A PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT ROLE IN THIS EFFORT. THE UCL WILL PROVIDE

ADVICE TO THE STUDENTS, AND THE STUDENTS WILL PROVIDE MANPOWER FOR UCL RESEARCH AND PROTEST PROJECTS. ON THE OTHER HAND, AS POLITICAL PARTIES BECOME ACTIVE, THE UCL COULD DECIDE TO DIRECT ITS ACTIVITIES TOWARD THESE MORE "GROWN-UP" ACTIVISTS. THE STUDENTS MIGHT HAVE DIFFICULTY FINDING ANOTHER GROUP OF SIMILAR SOPHISTICATION AND SENSITIVITY TO TURN TO FOR ADVICE.

15. THE SCENARIO OUTLINED HERE DEPENDS, HOWEVER, ON THREE CRITICAL FACTORS: THE NEW STUDENT LEADERS, THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LEADERS THEY REPLACE, AND THEIR LONG-TERM COMMITMENT AND DURABILITY. ASSESSMENT OF THESE FACTORS WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE UNTIL AFTER THE NEW YEAR BEGINS IN JUNE, AND THE STUDENTS ELECT FRESH LEADERRES. KINTNER

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